

There are many aspects of daily life which *Calvin & Hobbes* fails to address because of its limitations — things like romance and sex, for example. Peer pressure, politics, pornography, and the police aren't discussed, either. But no one book can give us all the answers to anything, anyway! It's a mistake to expect to find universal solutions or critiques in any one place. On that note, I hope you'll check out the Bibliography on the next page. It's full of further reading suggestions for nearly every topic covered in this book (and a few that aren't). Personally, I felt that *Calvin & Hobbes* helped make me more receptive to certain ideas; I hope that this collection will do the same for you, and the Bibliography is a good place to start.

There will be no further "bootleg" editions of *Calvin & Hobbes*, at least from me, but I always have new projects in the works. My first publication was a book called *The Hardcore/Punk Guide to Christianity*, and it was intended for a very narrow audience of kids involved in the underground punk rock/hardcore scene. If you're interested in reading it for some reason, you can order it from AK Press (PO Box 40682, San Francisco CA 94140-0682). I also did some writing for a punk rock/hardcore magazine called *Inside Front* (latest issue available from CrimethInc address in this book). Keep in touch with me and I'll let you know what's up. But please, don't just let your appreciation (or loathing) of this book become another excuse for consumption. Create your own books and magazines and songs and paintings. One of the most popular untruths in this society is that only certain kind of people can be writers or artists — no, everybody can write and draw and sing and paint and create. Get started today!

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Most of these can be found at your local library. If you can't find them, then here is a new addition in the making: tracking down mysterious books like some antiquarian out of a Lovecraft tale ...

calvin and hobbes

Guide to Daily Life

edited by Robin Banks

Dedication

This book is especially for Emma Black (a.k.a. zilch, KiraGirld, Ann Asti, riot brat, Mama Bear). Thank you for everything. This book — and its editor! — wouldn't exist without you.

It is also for Jim Bean, Paul F. Maul, Brian Diablo, Lydia Eccles, NicerChee Guevara, Gloria Cubans, Nadia C., FM. Dixon, August Spies, and all CrimethInc. workers, agents, and affiliated cells.

This book is for any kid, no matter what age, who always suspected that there was more to life.

Most of all, it is for Calvin and Hobbes — and Bill, of course.

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CrimethInc.

*NOTE - this is NOT the beautiful layout that Mr. Banks originally created... this is A sloppy shrunken version to save paper and distribute more widely. *



You can always count on Hobbes to say right through our human attempts to sell lifestyles to each other. There is a deep connection between the work which dominates our daily lives and the products which we all think we must have. Without the work, we can't afford the products, without the products, what's the point of working so much?

Afterword

This book was originally sixty-odd pages long. There are so many great *Calvin & Hobbes* strips which are relevant to the themes highlighted here that I wanted to include them all. However, because this book is supposed to be a cheap broadleaf with a very low price (if any price at all), I soon realized that photocopying costs would quickly become prohibitive. As it is, a thirty-six-page book is going to cost plenty to reproduce, but not nearly as much as one with double the pagecount.

I deleted a lot of the strips that I wanted to include because they were clearly repeating the same ideas expressed by another strip (while remaining funny and original, of course). When I first started this project I was concerned that I might have been imposing my own agenda on Bill Watterson's creation. Now that the editing is nearly complete, I realize that this is not the case. There were so many strips that criticized television, the workplace, school, and pollution that they couldn't have been incidental one-offs intended for a daily chuckle and nothing more. If you own a large number of the *Calvin & Hobbes* books (I think there are fourteen of them), take a few hours to flip through them. You'll be amazed at the sheer number of strips criticizing modern art, for example, not to mention television and so forth.

There was a separate theme that I wanted to include here but just couldn't for many reasons, not the least of which was the vast number of strips to choose from. That theme is *imagination*. A great deal of *Calvin*'s life is spent within an immense imaginary world filled with creativity and adventure: Spaceman Spiff, the transmogrifier, Tracer Bullet, the dinosaurus ... I think most young kids live in a world like this for many years until their creative, adventurous impulses are strangled out of them by the discipline and structure of compulsory schooling. Of course, those same impulses are kept at bay when they enter the workplace as well. What would *Calvin* think of the latest in video game technology? It might occupy his attention for a while, but it could never replace his transmogrifier. He might put a jurassic Park lunchbox on his Christmas list, but he would never give up his fascination with dinosaurs. We adults, on the other hand, have had our imaginations bought and sold. Instead of hiking in the wild woods we drive our SUVs through paved parks. Instead of creating our own music we head for the CD store. Instead of communities we have malls and chatrooms. I could go on but I think you get the point — *Calvin*'s unlimited imagination is probably the most wonderful thing about *Calvin & Hobbes*, more so than the critiques of television or school.

Introduction

by Robin Banks

I grew up reading *Calvin & Hobbes*. As a kid, I thought it was the best comic strip in the entire newspaper, right up there with *Bloom County*. I wasn't old enough to fully appreciate *Doomaday* but I was smart enough to realize that *The Family Circus*, *Blondie*, *Hagar the Horrible*, *Belle Bailey*, *the Lockharts*, *Wizard of Id*, and *B.C.* were all terrible pieces of shit drawn by either washed-up relic or sterile syndicate staffers. And yet *Calvin & Hobbes* managed to be funny and insightful and original nearly every single day. It was also, hands down, the best Sunday strip.

Later, I found out that Bill Watterson, the creator of *Calvin & Hobbes*, was a unique kind of cartoonist. Against all odds, against all expectations, he fiercely resisted the licensing (commodification) of his creation. In *The Calvin & Hobbes Ten-Year Anniversary Book* (published by Andrews and McMeel), Watterson explained his decision. He believed that "licensing cheapens the original creation" — that filling store shelves with a million *Calvin & Hobbes* knockoff products would make the strip seem like just another commercial tie-in instead of an artistic creation with its own merit. Watterson also felt that taking the artwork out of context (like on a T-shirt or coffee mug) was disrespectful to the medium. He wrote, "I don't want some animation studio giving Hobbes an actor's voice, and I don't want some greeting card company using Calvin to wish people a happy anniversary, and I don't want the issue of Hobbes' reality settled by a doll manufacturer." (One wonders how Watterson was ever able to get Charles Schulz, the king of crappy comic character commercialists, to write the Foreword to one of his books after expressing these opinions about licensing.)

I wish I could quote Watterson's arguments against licensing and commercialization at length, because they are not only relevant to *Calvin & Hobbes* but to all kinds of things in our daily lives. Our romantic desires are re-sold to us as commericals for perfume and diamond rings ... our need to escape from civilization is re-packaged as an SUV advertisement ... our urge to revolt is captured and displayed as a "rebellious" music video or band T-shirt. Watterson's resistance to this omnipresent onslaught of commodification is noble and admirable. Unfortunately, many people have successfully bootlegged Calvin in many ways — the worst example I can think of is that nearly ubiquitous "Calvin peeing on a logo" sticker that you see in the back windows of pickup trucks driven by extremely stupid people. I imagine that Bill Watterson, whenever he sees one of those stickers, must grit his teeth with rage and physically resist an urge to smash into whoever has the thing on display. (Bill, if you're reading this, remember that it's unhealthy to suppress your natural urges for too long. Go ahead and do it!)

Which brings me to this book. Why create a "new" *Calvin & Hobbes* book years after the fact — especially an unauthorized bootleg edition like this one? First of all, I am certainly not doing this to make money. If you paid money for your copy of this book, you should have been paying only for photocopying and distribution expenses, because I am certainly not making any money here, nor do I want to.

My main goal was to collect my favorite strips and unite them with commentary about their relevance to daily life. So many comic strips are nothing but cheap *gag* (and that's OK as long as they're funny — like *The Far Side*), but *Calvin & Hobbes* was always about more than just a daily chuckle while reading the newspaper. As Watterson says, "All strips are supposed to be entertaining, but some strips have a point of view and a serious purpose behind the jokes." I wanted to emphasize this point of view, at least in the way that I interpreted it.

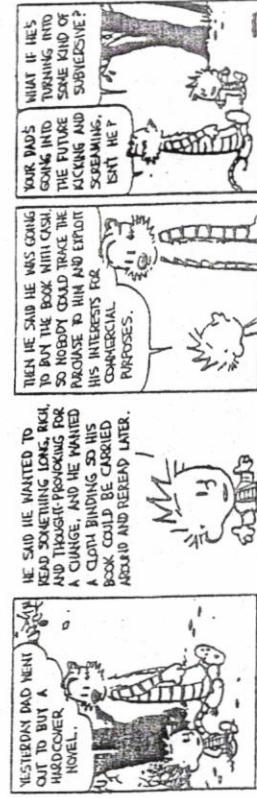
Watterson, more so than any other cartoonist I can think of, was highly critical of modern life. You'd have to start reading books by John Zerzan or Wendell Berry to find authors who were more skeptical of widely accepted tenets like the benefits of "civilization," the necessity of work and school, and the irrelevance of wild nature. Watterson may not have been as thorough or thoughtful as more "serious" writers (how could he if it was a *comic strip*), but then again, the North American English-speaking world didn't read homilies by Zerzan or Berry on a daily basis — they read *Calvin & Hobbes*, and I like to think that at least on some level they were affected by it.

Nowadays it seems like more and more people are willing to criticize everything that we take for granted. I remember Bill Watterson as being one of the first people I encountered who was willing to do this, and I wanted to bring his great work back into the picture with this collection. Not everybody is satisfied with *The Way Things Are*, least of all my good friend Calvin and his tiger, Hobbes. Thank you, Mr. Watterson, for introducing them to us all.

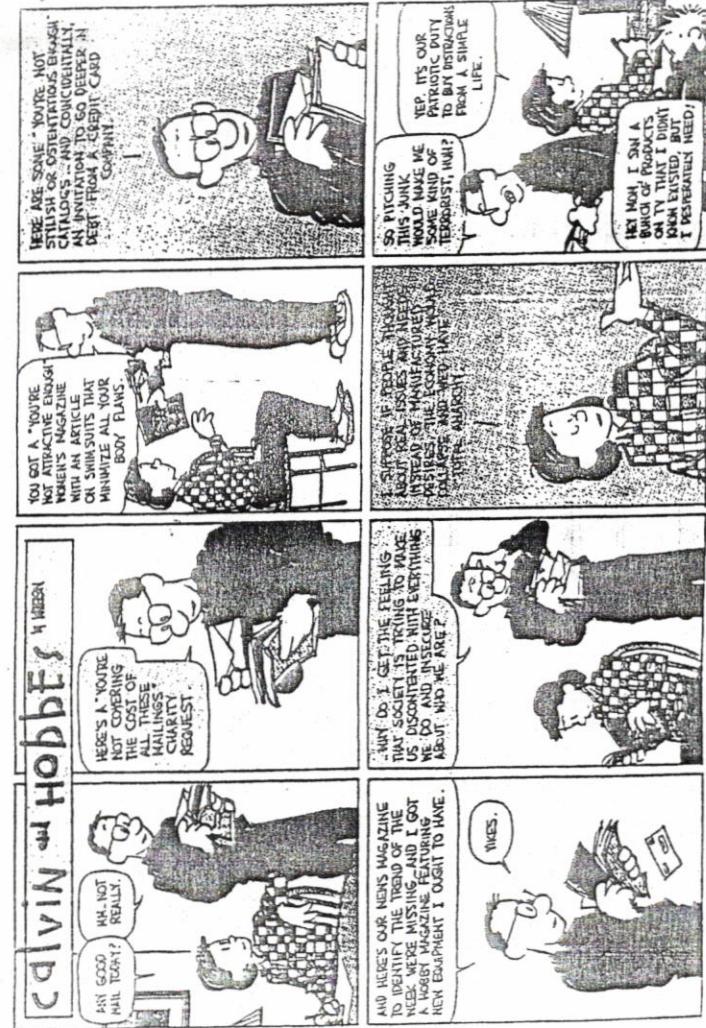
— Robin Banks, December 2000



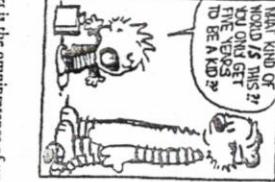
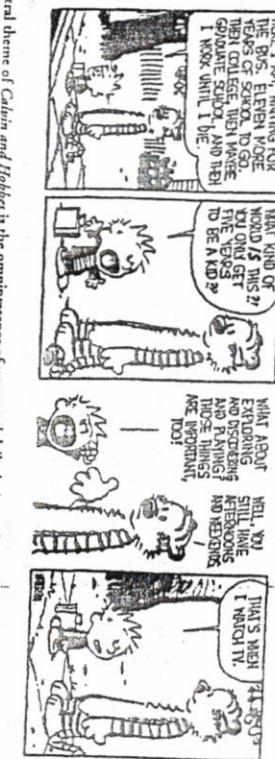
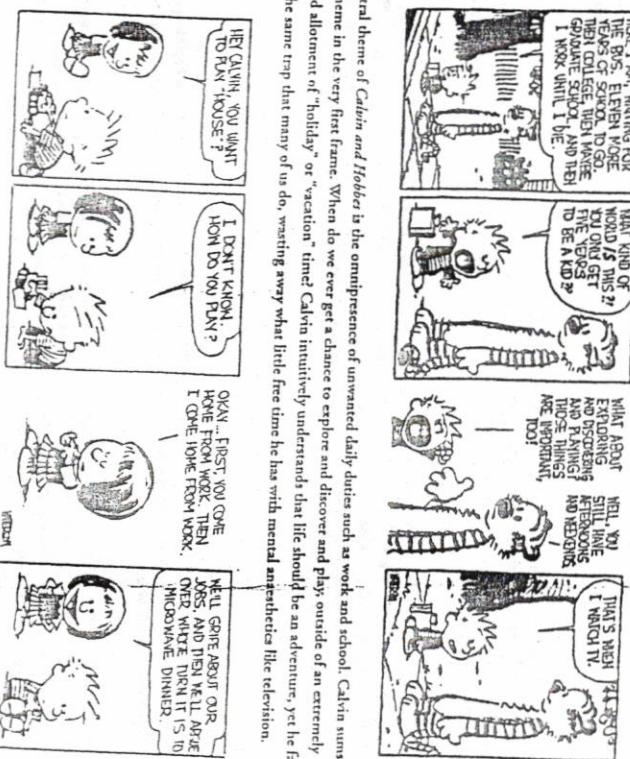
Calvin's dad was criticizing corporate culture way before it was cool to do so. Is it really a good idea for *everybody* to have the exact same cultural reference points?



Calvin's dad is clearly some kind of subversive Luddite terrorist — see the next page for another example.

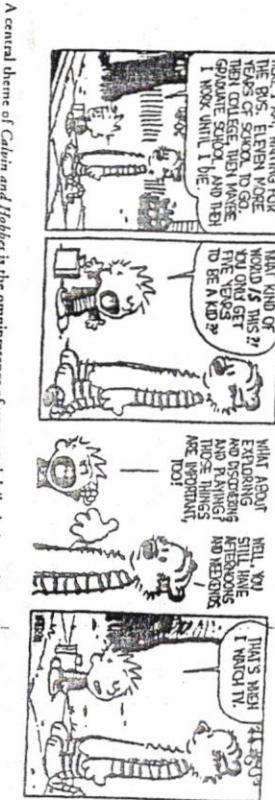


Work



Written

Susie knows that work takes away from your daily life. We spend all day separated from our loved ones, and then when we finally re-unite we are too exhausted and stressed out to do anything but heat up frozen dinner and compete for the best "worst day at work" story. Even on our few days off we are spending our time recovering from our jobs and not enriching ourselves and our relationships. The best we can do is yearn for some vacation time, or secretly hope to get fired.

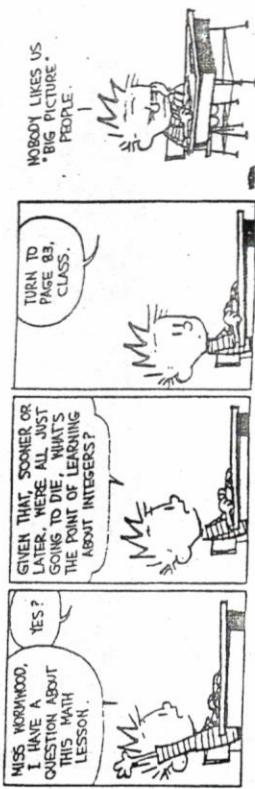


the Environment

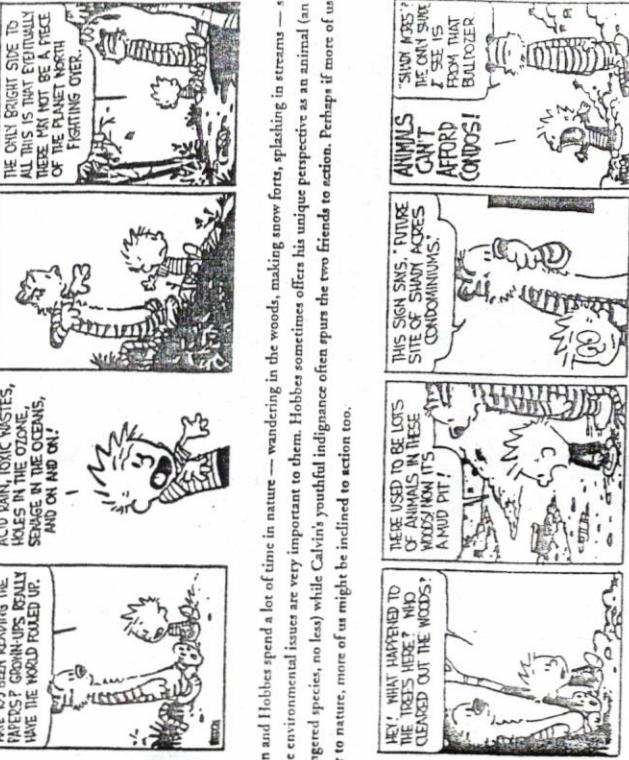
NATURE DOESN'T CARE IF PEOPLE LIVE OR DIE. IT REFUSES TO BE TAMED. IT DOES WHATEVER IT WANTS AND ACTS LIKE PEOPLE DON'T MATTER. IT MIGHT CONFIRM OUR RIGHT TO BE HERE.



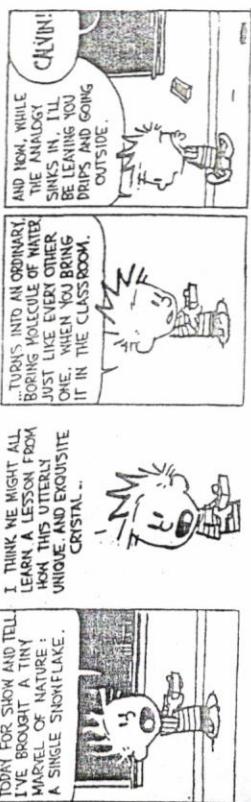
We usually think that 'primitives' had miserable lives, but recent research has demonstrated that so-called primitive societies were actually full of relaxation and luxury. Calvin's idea of luxury is running around naked in the woods with Hobbes, splashing in the mud, eating food provided by Nature, and counting the stars at night. The modern idea of luxury is working forty or more hours a week so we can buy trinkets to occupy our "free" time. Which idea sounds more like luxury to you?



A child may ask, "Why do I have to learn this?" The adult replies, "Look at the 'big picture' — in several years you'll need to know this when you're trying to get a job and survive." But the child may reply, "To me, the 'big picture' is that life is brief and unpredictable. On your deathbed, will it console you to know that you spent your time preparing to live instead of actually living?" And the adult shall have no reply except for the usual work ethic platitudes, and perhaps an acknowledgement that the trade of life for future security is a risky one at best.



Calvin and Hobbes spend a lot of time in nature — wandering in the woods, making snow forts, splashing in streams — so of course environmental issues are very important to them. Hobbes sometimes offers his unique perspective as an animal (an endangered species, no less) while Calvin's youthful indignance often spurs the two friends to action. Perhaps if more of us felt closer to nature, more of us might be inclined to action too.



One of the many drawbacks of forced schooling is that it imposes a single learning method upon diverse groups of kids who may learn different things at different rates and in different ways. The kids who fall behind are considered "slow" or "stupid" when in fact it may be the teaching technique that is inadequate. Kids recognize this, and thus there is great pressure for them not to appear too successful in the classroom. As a result, their behavior is homogenized, and the teachers come to treat entire classes as if they were all the same. Calvin's impulse to resist this homogenization has been echoed by innovative teachers around the world who realize that compulsory education and one-size-fits-all teaching styles are hurting, not helping.

As usual, Calvin and Hobbes see that the emperor is truly wearing no clothes. Have you ever noticed that subdivisions are often named after the things they replaced? In Louisville, Kentucky, there is a neighborhood named Deer Park that has neither deer nor parks. Several years ago there used to be a heavily wooded area outside of Louisville where an old monastery named after St. Thomas stood in the middle of a large field. And the name of the subdivision that replaced it all? "The Woods" of St. Thomas."



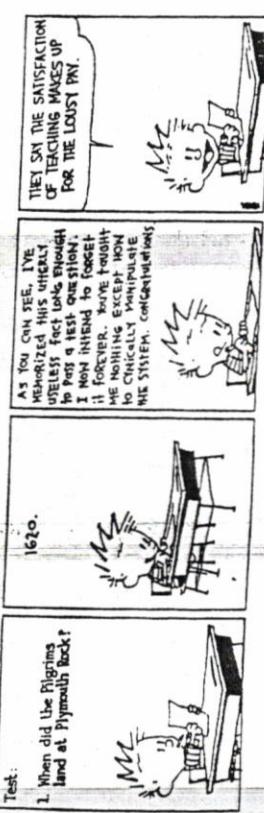
Kids have a natural desire to learn. For example, Calvin (like a lot of kids) is a veritable encyclopedia of facts about dinosaurs, space, the environment, or whatever other topic strikes his fancy. But in school he's forced to learn things that bore him — and the worst part is that compulsory schooling will probably ruin a lot of potentially rewarding activities for Calvin, like reading and writing. Why not let kids learn what they want to learn, when they want to learn it?



Instead of treating the act of writing as a vibrant means of expression, kids learn to consider it a chore. They fill essays with long words and tangents designed to inflate their page/word count, and when they move into the workplace they do the same thing with memos, forms and reports. Thanks to the arbitrary requirements of compulsory schooling, writing is considered best when it becomes its opposite: an obfuscating mire of depressing jargon instead of a beautiful, powerful method of communication.



It's the same problem Calvin likes to pose to his dad: it's a beautiful day, full of magic and opportunity, and yet its opportunities are squandered due to forced duties. What Calvin doesn't realize is that he can still take advantage of days like this if he would only talk his parents into allowing him to homeschool — an option we've been taught to consider unthinkable, or at the very least an option exercised only by fringe extremists.



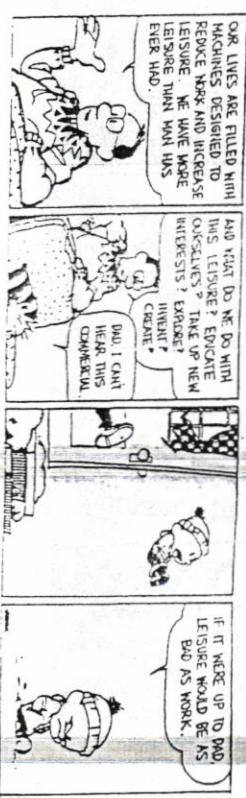
Calvin sums up the problems with the testing obsession shared by all advocates of forced schooling. Testing utterly fails to reflect the complexity of human beings and their various strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately they only reveal either our capability for memorization or obedience ... in other words, our ability to be good workers. And training for the workplace is what compulsory schooling is fundamentally about.



the Media



For all of his complaining about compulsory schooling, and all of his teasing about the demands of the workplace, Calvin sometimes falls into a very common trap: wasting his "free time" with consumption and absorption of messages urging him to consume even more. As Hobbes points out in another strip (not reproduced in this collection), there are many things we could be doing instead of watching TV, like reading a book, writing a letter, or taking a walk. We could be playing music, learning a new skill, exploring unfamiliar territory, visiting neighbors, or creating our own comic strips.



Nowadays we think of "work" and "leisure" (or "play") as two separate events. Our lives are neatly divided into sections — *this* time to work, to earn money; and *that* the time to play, to enjoy yourself, to be happy and content, to lol dice the human condition. But it isn't. For thousands of years, long before the idea of a "workplace" came to be, humans did all of their activities in the same place, with the same people, often in the same breath. Obviously we can't return to a simple hunter-gatherer lifestyle, but we can certainly learn from our ancestors' many forms of successful existence. We don't *have* to think of "work" as a time for energy and productivity and "leisure" as a separate time for joy and pleasure. But this is how Calvin perceives the world: work is when you get things done, a bicep, your goals, and strive for an accomplishment; leisure is when you "sige out," do nothing, achieve nothing, and strive for nothing. What Calvin doesn't realize is that his grandiose plans for now and construction, his extensive research and the leading habits of *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, and his efforts to outdo himself during "show and tell" are all work, in a way. If we can somehow tell us our lives that our chosen leisure is also the way we make a living, then we will have achieved the kinds of rules you can never make while clocking in and out for 40 hours a week.

School



Calvin's dad works to help support his family, and yet he can't spend time with them all he can do is wait for the weekends when, if he can successfully lower his stress levels and recover his creative energy, he can try to spend some quality time with his family or about the non work world around him. Is this any way to live?

